3.10 Visual Resources, Recreation, and Wilderness

1.1.1 3.10.1 Visual Resources

Visual resources are a composite of basic terrain, geologic features, water features, vegetative patterns, and land use effects that typify an area and influence the visual appeal that the area may have to people (Forest Plan). The scenic quality of the Project Area is influenced by the canyons which dissect the Wasatch Plateau, and various geologic formations providing a range of textures and colors evident in escarpments, canyon walls, and badlands. The horizontally bedded nature of these formations, as well as their component range of texture classes, is evident from the steep canyon walls, escarpments, and badlands visible in the Project Area. Flat ledges, vertical cliffs, and sloping erosional and depositional surfaces all contribute to the varied relief in the Project Area. The presence of the meandering Quitchupah Creek, its flood plain, and its terrace features also contribute to the visual diversity of the lower elevations of the Project Area.

The nature of vegetation in the landscape is consistently low and shrubby in the bottomlands, and blankets the valleys with a consistent cover, contrasting with the dotted juniper on reddish-brown eroding slopes. White to grey slopes present in some parts of the Project Area have less evident, sparse vegetative cover. Water courses are generally accented with willows, tamarisk, and cottonwood trees; along lower Quitchupah Creek, portions of the flood plain lack noticeable vegetation, but have extensive areas of bright white alkali deposits that provide for visual variation. The upper Quitchupah drainage transitions from the pinyon-juniper slopes to oak scrub and conifers, with aspen and dense willow patches in the narrow drainage bottom. The contrast of agricultural fields is another feature present in parts of the Project Area. Facilities in the viewshed include roads (SR-10 and Quitchupah Road), fences, power lines, transmission lines, corrals, mine structures, and fairly constant coal truck traffic. The landscape within and surrounding the Project Area, as well as the remote and peaceful nature of the Quitchupah and Water Hollow areas, and historical/cultural ties to the area contribute to the people's sense of important aesthetic values in this area.

The objective of Visual Resource Management (VRM) for BLM lands in the San Rafael Resource Area is "to provide design standards that protect or enhance designated VRM classes" (USDI-BLM, 1991). Visual Resource Management Classes I-IV are described as follows:

Class I	Preserve existing character of landscape; very limited management activity; low levels of change to the characteristic landscape.
Class II	Retain existing character of landscape; management activities should not attract attention; changes must blend with the natural landscape.
Class III	Partially retain existing character of landscape; moderate level of change allowed; management activities should not dominate the view; changes should blend with the natural landscape.
Class IV	Provision for management activities which require major modification of existing character of landscape; high level of change allowed; activities may dominate the view.

The areas of BLM public lands in the Quitchupah Creek area within Sevier County are classified as VRM Class IV. This classification provides for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. In Emery County, the BLM portion of Section 19, Township 22 South, Range 6 East, is designated as VRM Class III. The closest VRM Class II area is near the junction of SR-10 and I-70. The I-70 scenic corridor to the east of SR-10 in Emery County is designated as Class

I.

National Forest lands are typically inventoried based upon a system of Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) as part of the forest unit planning process. The VQOs are categories of acceptable landscape alteration measured in degrees of deviation from the natural landscape (Forest Plan). They are similar in concept to the BLM classes of management, and are described as follows:

Preservation (P)	Ecological change only.
Retention (R)	Human activities should not be evident to the casual Forest visitor.
Partial Retention(PR)	Human activities may be evident but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape.
Modification (M)	Human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape, but at the same time must utilize naturally occurring elements of the landscape including form, line color, and texture.
Maximum Modification (MM)	Human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape, but should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed as a background.

Forest lands in the Project Area have been designated under the VQO system as Modification.

Key Observation Points

Key Observation Points (KOP) were established as the predominant points from which viewers would be most likely to observe changes imposed by the proposed project. Three KOPs involve views from SR-10 towards the Project Area (See **Figure 3-5**). One KOP (#1) was established at the point where Quitchupah Creek Road meets SR-10; the second KOP (#2) was taken from the point where the proposed Water Hollow route would join SR-10. The third KOP (#3) was established at the Alternate Junction with SR-10. Although these would not be designated view areas, traffic turning onto the proposed Quitchupah Creek road, Water Hollow road, or Alternate Junction from SR-10 would be forced to slow considerably, and most likely provide an opportunity for viewing the project changes (see **Figure 3-5**).

Two KOPs were also established within the Project Area at the junction of the Alternative Junction and Quitchupah Creek Road (#4) and along the proposed Water Hollow Route (#5).

Potential Impacts To Visual Resources

The Environmental Consequences of each Alternative, in regard to visual resources, are discussed below. First, regulatory consequences are described and then potential impacts to the resource itself.

REGULATORY

The project would have no regulatory implications for visual resources. There would be no effects on visual classifications, a regulated land use planning criteria.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO VISUAL RESOURCES

NO ACTION - ALTERNATIVE A

There would be no effects to existing visual and aesthetic qualities of the Project Area. Views from SR-10 would remain as they currently exist, including the steady stream of coal trucks along SR-10 during hours of SUFCO Mine operation.

QUITCHUPAH CREEK ROAD ALIGNMENT - ALTERNATIVE B

The proposed Quitchupah Creek road itself would be visible in the immediate foreground as a paved lane entering SR-10, but would not be obvious unless viewed from the hill on SR-10 to the northeast, or

passing directly across the intersection while traveling on SR-10. The dominant terrain at the intersection is stream terraces supporting tall brush. The haul truck traffic (trucks every 1.5 to 3 minutes) through lower Quitchupah Creek may be visible for a few minutes in the background south of the intersection by northbound travelers on SR-10. The background view is dominated by shrub-covered flats, low hills, and small mesas. Road cut and fill disturbance from construction would be visible in the immediate foreground from within the canyon, however, these contrasts would fade somewhat over time, with soil/rock weathering, and reclamation.

The project does meet the standards for BLM's VRM Class IV and the USFS's VQO activity of Modification. None of the visual classifications would need to be changed to accommodate the project.

The aesthetic qualities of the canyon, including its peaceful and remote nature, would be altered forever. However, the degree to which individuals are affected by the intrusion of a paved road and associated coal truck traffic would be personal and may vary depending upon reasons for using the canyon, as well as personal ties to the history of the area.

The new junction with SR-10 would require additional lanes for turning and acceleration at an existing intersection from the east with the CONSOL Mine Road. These changes would not affect the existing visual and aesthetic qualities of the Project Area.

ALTERNATE JUNCTION AND ALTERNATE DESIGN - ALTERNATIVE C

Visual and aesthetic implications of Alternative C would be similar to those of the Alternative B in the majority of the canyon. Additional structures in the form of concrete underpasses would be visible to travelers on the road, however they would not dominate the view. Between the Sevier County/Emery County line and the junction with SR-10, this route crosses low shrub-covered gentle slopes adjacent to SR-10 and dissected tree-covered slopes on the western portion. The existing character of the landscape would be partially retained in this area.

A new junction with SR-10 would be required for this Alternative with additional lanes for turning and acceleration along SR-10. These changes would not effect the existing recreation, visual and aesthetic qualities of the Project Area.

WATER HOLLOW ALTERNATE ALIGNMENT - ALTERNATIVE D

Views from KOP #1 at the Quitchupah Creek Road junction with SR-10 would remain unaffected by this Alternative. From KOP #2, the road would be obvious mainly in the foreground of low shrub-covered valley slopes. The road would essentially disappear into the hills and bluffs to the west as it crosses behind some low tree-covered rugged hills less than one mile from SR-10.

Within the Water Hollow Benches, the visual changes would be dramatic, with the large cut and fill volumes needed to cross the many deep drainage cuts across these benches. The changes due to large cut and fills would be within management activities criteria for VRM Class IV (**Figure 3-5**). The scenery within the Project Area consists of large mesas, wide benches, and deep dissected slopes. Views from the road on the Benches would be panoramic scenes of the valley below and mountains in the distance.

A new junction with SR-10 would be required for this Alternative with additional lanes for turning and acceleration along SR-10. These changes would not effect the existing visual and aesthetic qualities of the Project Area.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING FOR BUILD ALTERNATIVES

Careful consideration has been given to the siting of the proposed alignments to reduce adverse visual

impacts to the maximum extent possible. The reclamation of disturbed areas along with monitoring to ensure successful reclamation and to prevent erosion would over time allow the bare areas to revegetate and emulate the native plant communities. No further mitigation or monitoring activities are described for the Proposed Action or Alternatives.

IRREVERSIBLE OR IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES AND RESIDUAL ADVERSE IMPACTS

The aesthetic qualities of Quitchupah Creek would be altered forever. Residual adverse impacts would be the presence, form, and line of a paved road in the Quitchupah drainage or Water Hollow Benches.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

The Proposed Action, in conjunction with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions would result in additional surface disturbance. Surface disturbance in the past has resulted from the development of the old two-track road, mining facilities, and power transmission lines. Once the reclamation has occurred, a large portion of the new surface disturbance would not be noticeable to the casual observer. Exploration for gas may require additional roads and disturbance. The proposed road would contribute a cumulative impact to visual resources.

1.1.2 3.10.2 Recreation

The majority of the Project Area is located within Sevier County with a small portion located in Emery County. The project proposes to upgrade the existing USFS Road 006 that is classified as an unimproved road (Class 4). A Class 4 road is defined by the USFS as a native surface, unimproved, jeep trail-high clearance road (Reed, 1999). The BLM portion of the road is identified as BLM Road #908.

The dominant recreation activities within the Project Area are hunting in the fall and ATV use year-round as conditions permit. The Project Area lies within the Manti Management Unit for elk and deer. In 1999, the large Manti Management Unit as a whole, reported about 16,500 deer hunters afield, with a 32 percent success rate, and almost 11,000 elk hunters with a 23 percent success rate, according to UDWR (2001). The Project Area has much less hunting effort than most of the Manti Unit. Local guides provide guided hunting trips in the Project Area for deer, elk, and mountain lion. Upland game is also hunted. Trapping for bobcat and coyote also occurs in the Project Area.

ATV use occurs both by individual local riders, and by organized clubs who gather regularly to ride in the area. One of those groups, the Southeastern Utah Off-Highway Vehicle (SEUOHV) Club has proposed that a series of two-track dirt roads across southeastern Utah be placed within a single system called the Castle Valley Trail System (Peterson, 1999). Included in the proposed Castle Valley Trail System is USFS Road 006, the existing dirt road within Quitchupah Creek canyon. The proposed trail system has been submitted to both the USFS and the BLM for approval. The SEUOHV Club currently has approximately 160 members which use the existing Quitchupah Creek road seasonally between April 15 and November 15. This two-track road is important to ATV users because it is one of the few ways that USFS land is accessed by ATVs from communities in Emery County (Peterson, 1999). Portions of the Water Hollow Benches and the flats to the east are accessible to ATVs; other portions are too rugged and dissected for vehicle use. The BLM has not designated vehicle routes. There are seasonal restrictions on vehicle use on some of the public lands for wildlife concerns.

BLM regulations, at 43 CFR 8340, outline the requirements for managing off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on public lands. The 1991 San Rafael RMP directed the Price Field Office to designate routes within the

"limited to designated roads and trails" category through a public process. The route designations apply only to public lands, and are not applicable on state lands and private land inholdings. Other roads that have existing rights-of-way (ROW) will retain the restrictions or stipulations provided in the ROW.

In February of 2003 the BLM established the San Rafael Route Designation Plan which includes part of the proposed Project Area. The Plan provides a comprehensive system of open OHV routes with the BLM and County Class B road systems to provide more than 2,000 miles of roads and trails for recreation. The proposed Project Area is enveloped by the OHV categories "Open Areas" and "Limited to Designated Routes". The Quitchupah Creek Road is currently designated a "Road - Not subject to Recreational Designations". Also, part of the proposed Project Area is within designated Seasonal Limitations for Deer and Elk range. Travel is limited in these Seasonal Limitations for Deer and Elk areas between December 1 and April 15 of each year.

The BLM Travel Plan, due out in 2006 after the release of the final RMP, will designate a system of trails for OHVs, including ATVs. The Richfield RMP will designate areas where proposed uses, such as OHV sites, are acceptable on BLM land.

The Fishlake National Forest OHV Designation Plan is scheduled to be implemented in the summer of 2006. This Plan will designate roads, trails, and open areas for the use of OHVs. The rules and designations in the Plan will close the Forest to off-route motorized cross-country travel by OHVs except in designated areas. This Plan will improve management and enforcement of OHV use on Forest land.

Less dominant recreational uses in the general vicinity include dispersed camping, hiking, mountain bike riding, horseback riding, and sightseeing. There are no designated camp grounds or specific destination sites within the Project Area. Roads within the Quitchupah Creek Road Project Area are primarily four-wheel drive roads.

The public land in the Project Area has been classed by Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Classes. According to the Fishlake National Forest LRMP, the majority of the USFS-administered lands in the Project Area are designated as having a semi-primitive motorized recreational opportunity (USDA-USFS, 1986). According to the San Rafael RMP (USDI-BLM, 1991), the BLM-managed lands along the existing two-track Quitchupah Creek Road are classed as Roaded Natural (about equal opportunities for affiliation with other use groups and for isolation from sights and sounds of man), and the Water Hollow Benches area is within Roaded Natural and Semi-primitive Motorized (some opportunity for isolation from the sights and sounds of man) ROS categories.

The Acord Lakes recreational area located to the west of the Project Area has approximately 100 seasonal homes.

The USFS has conducted various Roadless Area Review and Evaluations (RARE) on Forest lands. The nearest designated RARE are areas located 2.5 to 3 miles north and northwest of the Project Area, in the Manti-La Sal and Fishlake National Forests.

Potential Impacts To Recreation

REGULATORY

Increased access would likely increase use and may increase unauthorized use of areas restricted from motorized use. RMP ROS classes may require revision; these adjustments may be included in the updated RMP due to be released in 2006.

NO ACTION - ALTERNATIVE A
The dispersed recreation use would continue in this area.

QUITCHUPAH CREEK ROAD ALIGNMENT - ALTERNATIVE B
Implementation of the proposed project would improve access to the area for big and upland game hunters and other recreationists. Allocated harvest numbers set forth by UDWR for the Manti Management Unit would remain unaffected by the proposed Quitchupah Creek Road project, but the number of hunters in the area could increase. Local guided hunting trips in the area would likely decrease with easier access to the area, while poaching opportunities from the paved road could potentially increase. However, construction activity and increased traffic can negatively impact wildlife and, if so, hunting opportunities may decline if wildlife numbers decrease due to collisions with vehicles or avoidance of the area.

Other recreationists, including campers, hikers, and sightseers would also have improved access to public land due to the proposed road, however, the quality of these dispersed recreation activities may be reduced due to noise from construction or traffic, or if wildlife avoids the area. The greater access from the east that the road would afford to the Acord Lakes recreational areas could be an economic benefit to Sevier County.
During weekdays coal trucks would be traveling on the road at 1.5 - 3.0 minute intervals depending upon the volume of coal transported to eastern markets and power plants. This concentration of traffic would influence any recreational uses adjacent to or on the road. During most weekends the road would be free of coal trucks. Dispersed recreation use in an isolated setting would no longer be available in Quitchupah Creek.

Under this alternative, the new paved Quitchupah Creek road from Highway 10 to the coal mine would be open to licensed, street-legal vehicles only. This would affect the proposed SEUOHV Castle Valley Trail system, since OHV access would be eliminated on the new paved road. The potential opportunity for designated OHV routes in the Water Hollow Benches area would remain. There would be no impact to the San Rafael Route Designation Plan.

ALTERNATE JUNCTION AND ALTERNATE DESIGN - ALTERNATIVE C
Under this alternative, the new paved Quitchupah Creek road from Highway 10 to the coal mine would be open to licensed, street-legal vehicles only. This would affect the proposed SEUOHV Castle Valley Trail system, since OHV access would be eliminated on the new paved road. The potential opportunity for designated OHV routes in the Water Hollow Benches area would remain. There would be no impact to the San Rafael Route Designation Plan.

WATER HOLLOW ALTERNATE ALIGNMENT - ALTERNATIVE D
Under this alternative, the new paved Quitchupah Creek road from Highway 10 to the coal mine would be open to licensed, street-legal vehicles only. The existing Quitchupah Creek road from Highway 10 to the National Forest boundary would remain accessible to the public, but only from the eastern end at the Highway 10 entrance. Motorized access from the existing Quitchupah Creek road at the National Forest boundary to the proposed new paved road would be eliminated. This alternative would affect the proposed SEUOHV Castle Valley Trail system, since OHV access would be eliminated on the new paved road and there would be no designated OHV route accessing the Water Hollow Benches. Current OHV and equestrian recreation use is low in the Water Hollow Benches area, and these users would likely be affected by reduced solitude and isolation that construction of the road and heavy coal truck traffic would bring. There would be no impact to the San Rafael Route Designation Plan.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING FOR BUILD ALTERNATIVES
No further mitigation or monitoring activities are proposed for recreation resources for the Proposed

Action. Under Alternative D, the big game winter range would increase through seedings supporting a larger wintering population of elk and deer. This action could increase big game numbers available for hunting.

IRREVERSIBLE OR IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES AND RESIDUAL ADVERSE IMPACTS
Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in a loss of the natural, roaded, and semi-primitive motorized dispersed type of recreation.

The loss of semi-primitive recreation opportunities, as the current dominant recreation opportunity in the area, adjacent to the proposed road would be a residual adverse impact.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS
The development of the proposed road and possible future exploration/development of gas fields would permanently change the access to the area and increase industrial activity in a remote isolated area. As the area becomes more accessible, especially after the life of the mine, recreational use of the area would increase. As more recreationists utilize the area, it is likely that recreation experiences would be impacted for some. The area would be less remote. Recreation activities, such as hunting, would be affected by more intense use.

1.1.3 3.10.3 Wilderness and Congressionally Designated Areas

There are four types of wilderness designations/proposals in Utah: designated Wilderness Areas; Wilderness Study Areas (WSA); Wilderness Inventory Units (WIU) (lands identified in 1999 by the BLM as having wilderness characteristics); and proposed wilderness areas (HR 1732 lands proposed by the Utah Wilderness Coalition (UWC).

According to the BLM (Finger, 2001), WSAs are managed under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review. The general standard for interim management of those lands is that they must be managed so their suitability for designation is not impaired. WIUs are lands inventoried and determined to have wilderness characteristics. These areas are presently being considered for WSA status through a land-use planning process. The Department of Interior policy is that while the planning process is being completed, the management prescriptions of existing land use plans will apply to these inventory units. The BLM policy is to pay careful and particular attention to proposals that could limit Congress' ability to designate the units as wilderness. Therefore, BLM considers actions proposed in these lands on a case-by-case basis to determine potential impacts to wilderness characteristics. The HR 1732 lands are not given special consideration under present Federal government policy (Finger, 2001). The Project Area does not occur within a designated Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The closest proposed WSA is Devils Canyon, approximately 10 to 15 miles southeast of the Project Area (USDI-BLM, 1991).

There are no wilderness designations/nominations or Roadless Areas in the Project Area. The closest WSAs (BLM) are located about 15 to 20 miles southeast of the Project Area in the San Rafael Swell, as is the western boundary of the proposed San Rafael Swell National Conservation Area. The nearest Roadless Areas (USFS) are located 2.5 to 3 miles north and northwest of the Project Area in the Manti LaSal and Fishlake National Forests. However, the Fishlake National Forest does not allow motorized vehicle travel in an area that generally coincides with the Old Woman Research Natural Area (RNA), located about 0.5 mile west of the Water Hollow alternate alignment.

A Research Natural Area (RNA) is located near the Project Area on Fishlake National Forest land. RNAs

are tracts of land that approximate pristine conditions and are designated for scientific and educational uses. The RNA, referred to as Old Woman Cove, was officially designated in November 1998 (USDA-USFS, 1998). It encompasses approximately 2,520 acres and is located about 0.5 mile west and south of the Water Hollow alternate alignment.

There are no non-WSA lands with or likely to have wilderness characteristics in the general vicinity of the Project Area.

Potential Impacts To Wilderness

NO ACTION - ALTERNATIVE A

There would be no effect upon any WSA, WIU, UWC proposed areas, or RNA.

BUILD ALTERNATIVES - ALTERNATIVE B, C, D

No roadless areas are affected by the proposed Quitchupah Creek Road project or Alternatives. There would be no effect upon any WSA, WIU, UWC proposed areas, or RNA by this project.

IRREVERSIBLE OR IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES AND RESIDUAL ADVERSE IMPACTS

No irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources would occur as a result of the Proposed Action. No residual adverse impacts to wilderness resources are anticipated from any of the Alternatives as analyzed above.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

The implementation of the Proposed Action, in conjunction with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions would not conflict with wilderness resources. There would be no cumulative effects to wilderness resources under the proposed road.